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# COMMUNIST HERITAGE TOURISM AND RED TOURISM: CONCEPTS, DEVELOPMENT AND PROBLEMS

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## **Communist heritage tourism and red tourism: concepts, development and problems**

**Cosmin Ciprian Caraba**

**Communist heritage tourism and red tourism: concepts, development and problems.** The second part of the 20th century has been marked by the competition between capitalism and communism. The “Autumn of Nations” put an end to the Eastern Bloc, but each former communist country in Central and Eastern Europe still possesses heritage sites reminding of the communist period. These heritage sites are turning into major tourist attractions, being sought by western tourists. Halfway around the world the Chinese Communist Party is trying to develop Red Tourism, a specific type of cultural tourism, based on heritage sites of the Chinese communist revolution. While the two tourism types use communist heritage as primary resource there are several differences between them. The study compares European communist heritage tourism with Chinese “Red Tourism”, analyzing their emergence, development and the problems they face, especially regarding heritage interpretation. This paper will try to provide a theoretical base for studying communist heritage tourism in former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

**Key words:** communism, China, Eastern Europe, red tourism, communist heritage tourism, heritage interpretation.

**Turismul patrimoniului comunist și turismul roșu: concepte, dezvoltare și probleme.** A doua parte a secolului al XX-lea a fost marcată de o competiție continuă între capitalism și comunism. “Toamna națiunilor” a marcat căderea Blocului Estic, dar fiecare fost stat comunist din Europa Centrală și de Est încă păstrează simboluri ce amintesc de perioada comunistă. Aceste elemente de patrimoniu au devenit importante atracții turistice, fiind căutate de turiștii occidentali. De cealaltă parte a lumii, Partidul Comunist Chinez încearcă să dezvolte Turismul Roșu, un tip specific de turism cultural, bazat pe situri legate de Revoluția Comunistă Chineză. În timp ce cele două tipuri de turism utilizează aceeași resursă turistică, patrimoniul comunist, există câteva diferențe majore între ele. Studiul compară turismul de patrimoniu comunist din Europa și “Turismul Roșu” din China, analizând apariția și dezvoltarea lor, precum și problemele cu care acestea se confruntă, punând accentul pe interpretarea patrimoniului. Articolul încearcă să creeze o bază teoretică pentru studierea viitoare a turismului de patrimoniu comunist din fostele state comuniste ale Europei Centrale și de Est.

**Cuvinte cheie:** comunism, China, Europa de Est, turism roșu, turismul patrimoniului comunist, interpretarea patrimoniului

## 1. INTRODUCTION

After the fall of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II, the world was divided between the winning factions. Each superpower (the United States and the Soviet Union) created international military alliances (NATO and the respectively the Warsaw Pact) as they sought to gain influence on as much of the world as possible.

While the United States consolidated its influence in Japan and Western Europe, with economic recovery plans as the 1948-1952 Marshall Plan, Soviet Russia attempted to create several satellite states in Eastern Europe.

Soon, it became clear that friendship between communism and capitalism was not meant to be. As their common enemies (Nazi Germany and Japan) were defeated, tensions between the two superpowers quickly arose leading to the Cold War, which lasted until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989.

The period between 1947 and 1990 was marked by a general competition between the two ideological blocs in all areas from sports competitions (like the Olympics) to the Race to the Moon, and from nuclear weapons production and testing to indirect conflicts like the Vietnam or the Korean wars.

The 40 year period of the Cold War which transformed the entire world ended with the “Autumn of Nations” of 1989 when the Soviet Union collapsed. Images like the fall of the Berlin Wall and the tanks guarding the Communist Party Central Committee Building in Revolution Square in Bucharest or Ceausescu’s last speech from the balcony of the same building have remained in people’s minds and were used in every tourist guide of the former communist countries.

Even if some of the communist buildings and symbols (like statues of communist heroes and leaders) were destroyed after the fall of communism, many sites have survived and still remind local people and tourists alike, of the socialist past of east-central European countries.

In the past 20 years, western tourists have started to be interested in the heritage of the communist period, in seeing what it was like to live behind the Iron Curtain. This was especially true immediately after the fall of communism. In Bucharest, as Light notes, western tourists flocked to the city immediately after the Romanian Revolution of 1989 to feel the atmosphere in the city. Now, as some former soviet-bloc countries (like Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltic states) have become members of the European Union, which implies easier travel, the number of foreign tourists in general, and the number of communist heritage tourists in particular should rise.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Although communist heritage tourism emerged during the early 1990s the first scientific articles that covered the phenomenon appeared in the first years of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. Most of the studies that analyzed communist heritage tourism came from the United Kingdom where Duncan Light and Craig Young focused on problems of heritage interpretation and national identity, particularly in Romania, Poland and Germany. Duncan Light argues that communist heritage tourism - the consumption of key sights and sites associated with the Ceausescu regime and its overthrow - has emerged as a particular form of cultural or heritage tourism for special interest tourists and most important that communist heritage is defined and constructed outside Romania, as there is a specific desire to erase the communist period from the country's history [1].

Newer studies have expanded the research area, focusing on countries like Bulgaria[2] and Albania, accompanied by a diversification of studies regarding the use of communist heritage as a tourism resource in Romania (mainly in the capital, Bucharest)[3].

While communist heritage tourism is interesting to both foreign tourists and scholars, "Red Tourism" has been studied internally, by Chinese researchers from different fields. Red Tourism studies developed in the last 8-10 years have focused primarily on strategies for developing and marketing red sites in different Chinese provinces.

## **3. COMMUNIST HERITAGE AS A TOURISM RESOURCE**

In the last 20 years, heritage sites related to communist regimes or their downfall have become resources for two niche cultural tourism types: European communist heritage tourism and the state-driven Chinese Red Tourism.

Red Tourism was introduced in China in 2004 when a National Red Tourism Development Plan was discussed. According to the National Red Tourism Development Planning 2004–2010, which was publicized jointly by the State Council and the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party, red tourism is a themed tourism activity of learning, sightseeing, and nostalgia in communist heritage sites which commemorate past communist revolutionary events, heroes, and leaders [4].

He Guangwei, head of China's National Tourism Administration (CNTA) emphasizes that, the development and promotion of "red tourism" is a need to eulogize the brilliant cause of the (Chinese Communist) Party, inspire and carry forward China's national spirits [5].

The concept of „Red Tourism” in China covers mainly (if not only) activities involving visits to places where different communist leaders and heroes were born or to sites related to the Chinese Communist Revolution, its main purpose being to promote the history of the Communist Party during the years 1921 and 1949 which marked the period between the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party and the proclamation of the People`s Republic of China (1<sup>st</sup> of October 1949).

As most of these red heritage sites are located in poorer, land-locked provinces, Red Tourism can help the economic development of these provinces, bringing important profits for local communities.

Chinese Red Tourism also has a strong educational side, as it tries to establish trust and loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party. Red Tourism is directed especially towards the young Chinese, with many facilities (mainly price reductions for transport and entrance fees) for pupils and students.

Communist heritage tourism in Central and Eastern Europe, emerged after 1990 and used as resources, heritage sites related to the former communist regimes and their downfall.

Communist heritage tourism involves visits to places associated with the Communist or socialist past and present or to sites which represent or commemorate that past or present [6].

Communist heritage tourism can also be defined as the consumption of sites and sights associated with the former communist regimes [7].

Light argues that as Red Tourism is a type of cultural tourism specific to China relating to the beginning of the Chinese Communist Party, to Mao and the Chinese Communist Revolution it cannot be used to describe visiting communist heritage sites in European Countries. Similarly, the term “communist heritage tourism” perhaps follows the actual marketing of such sites too closely, and again fails to account for the fact that what most of “Eastern Europe” experienced, was various forms of state-socialism (Light, Young, 2006).

The representativeness of these terms is still debatable, but we feel that communist heritage tourism is the best term to use when referring to the use of communist heritage sites as tourism resources in former European communist states.

Communist heritage tourism is a niche cultural tourism which emerged after 1990 and implies the visit to sites associated with communist regimes or their downfall.

#### **4. EMERGENCE OF RED TOURISM IN CHINA**

The development of Red Tourism in China started with the National Red Tourism Development Plan 2004–2010. Elaborated by the Communist Party, the plan outlines the basic ideas of developing red tourism, in terms of its significance,

development goals, and strategies. Most importantly, it shapes a production network of red tourism by defining and selecting tourism resources, promotion themes, preferential development areas, and even the preferentially developed tourist sites, which include 12 major red tourism regions, 30 recommended routes, and 100 key red tourism scenic sites [8].

Among the goals of this plan we can count: awakening a sense of patriotism and loyalty to the Party and the People's Republic of China. At the same time, because red tourism in China is linked mainly with the period before the proclamation of the republic (1949), most of the sites are in poor provinces where the Communist Party had more supporters. These provinces have not made great economic progress and red tourism can help their development by improving infrastructure, bringing additional profits to local communities and improving living standards.

The plan was preceded by the declaration of Zhengzhou, signed at the National Tourism Conference in February 2004 by many provinces of the central region of China, aiming at greater cooperation in harnessing the (tourism) resources available.

As Li and Hu (2008) note the Chinese Government is heavily involved in all aspects regarding the development of Red Tourism. Its activities range from promoting red tourism, through different media sources (from radio and TV to the internet) or by organizing promotional events (like the National Red Tourism Exposition in Nanchang, the capital of the Jiangxi Province) to developing human resources involved in red tourism activities (seven training sessions between 2005 and 2007).

The Chinese government also arranged a special fund for red tourism infrastructure construction since 2005. According to an annual report of NRTCET (National Red Tourism Coordination Executive Team) in 2006, 1.1 billion RMB (approximately US \$146 million) were invested from 2005 to 2006 to support more than 100 infrastructure projects, including transportation, power facilities, and water supply. Meanwhile, local governments are urged to provide supplementary financial support.

Another way to help the development and to promote red tourism is by providing discounts for groups of teenagers, students, soldiers and elderly, to almost every aspect of red tourism, from transport and accommodation to entrance fees.

## **5. COMMUNIST HERITAGE TOURISM IN EUROPE**

In Eastern Europe, communist heritage tourism emerged after 1990. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, thousands of western tourists chose the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe as tourism destinations. 15 years later, a new factor encouraged the growth of communist heritage tourism: the accession of the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe to the European Union

(Hungary, the Baltic states, Poland and the Czech Republic in 2004, followed by Romania and Bulgaria in 2007). This led to an increase in accessibility (determined by the lack of borders inside the union) and hence an increase in the number of Western tourists.

Almost all Central and Eastern European states have developed tourism programs (or tours) based on sites related to the communist period. The best example is Poland, known for Nowa Huta, a district of Krakow ("The New Steel Mill"). Having a population of about 200,000 people, the district was planned specifically to be one of the pillars of the Polish steel industry and inhabited by the workers of the „Vladimir Lenin” Steelworks (the biggest steel mill in Poland). Due to its remarkable communist architecture, Nowa Huta became an important tourist attraction sought by foreign tourists and organized tours of the district and the steelworks quickly appeared.

Another example of using communist heritage as a tourism resource can be found in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. Here, after the fall of communism, all the statues symbolizing communist personalities and heroes were removed and transported to a park. Opened in 1993, Szoborpark (or Memento Park) became one of the city’s main sights. The park had a great success among tourists and over the years it became an open-air museum that includes many sights: the red star store, a theater showing short films regarding Secret Police Training Methods in Communist Hungary, a photo exhibitions focusing on everyday life in communist Hungary and Stalin’s Grandstand, a 1:1 replica of the pedestal of a bronze statue of Stalin, destroyed in 1956.

Memento Park is not the only communist attraction in Budapest. The city also has the Terror Hazza (House of Terror), a museum that presents both the fascist and communist regimes that controlled Hungary during the 20th century.

Other museums that present the communist period have been opened in the last decade in most of the former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe. One of them, the Museum of Communism in Prague (Czech Republic), ironically located above a McDonald’s restaurant, offers an insight into life in communist Czechoslovakia, and particularly in Prague. As the museum’s site says the theme of the Museum is "Communism- the Dream, the Reality, and the Nightmare" and visitors are shown an interrogation room, a historical schoolroom and TV video clips from the communist period among other exhibits that present the totalitarian period.

Other communist museums (or Soviet occupation museums) have been opened in the Baltic States, in the capitals of Riga, Tallinn, and Vilnius, in Kiev (Ukraine) and Tbilisi (Georgia).

Besides these countries, a large number of tourists enjoy the communist heritage sites in Germany, especially in Berlin. The city was divided during the communist period and parts of the Berlin Wall (like the Brandenburg Gate) and especially Checkpoint Charlie have become major tourist attractions.



If the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, we do not know precisely the extent of communist heritage tourism, in China between 2004 and 2007 more than 400 million people have taken "red tourism" holidays, bringing in over \$13.5 billion to many of the country's most economically deprived areas, exceeding even the estimated amounts to be collected until 2010 [9].

## **6. PROBLEMS AND HERITAGE INTERPRETATION**

Despite rapid growth and high revenues obtained, there are enough contestants of both red tourism and communist heritage tourism. One of the major problems encountered for both tourism types is heritage interpretation.

Firstly, in China, older members of the Communist Party, the old revolutionaries have deemed the use for profits of sites and heroes related to the Chinese Revolution as unacceptable. They also bring into question the immorality of obtaining substantial profits from the sale of images of people who entered into history by anti-capitalist attitudes and beliefs.

Another problem with red tourism thematic tours is the lack of variety of tourist attractions included in the tour. Although tours include major attractions with great historical and emotional meaning the lack of diversification may lead to lower interest for such tours. Because of this, thematic tours based on communist heritage sites extend over a period of a few days and alternate communist attractions with other tourist sites and activities. This is especially true in Eastern Europe, where tourist packages include sites related to different periods of history while the state led Chinese Red Tourism theme tours (red tours) can range from several days for up to two weeks, relying almost entirely on sites related to the life of Mao and the Chinese revolution.

If in the People's Republic of China heritage interpretation is made in one direction, which is to glorify and commemorate the heroes and events related to the early communist period preceding the proclamation of the Chinese republic in the former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe there are issues with how the communist era is viewed and perceived by both local people and authorities.

As Light notes, the governments of former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe do not want the states they lead to be associated with communism, as they are trying to build new European images for their countries. The result is the tendency to erase the communist period (this can be viewed especially in the museums of Bucharest, where the communist period is almost absent) or to present it as a mistake of history.

Hence, there is little interest in promoting the communist-era monuments and sites. Perhaps the best example is the People's House (the Palace of Parliament) in Bucharest, which is perceived by foreigners as a symbol for the city, while many of

Bucharest's inhabitants do not consider it as Romanian heritage and even think it should be destroyed as it reminds of a "dark" period in Romanian history.

## 7. RED TOURISM VS. COMMUNIST HERITAGE TOURISM

Between the two forms of cultural tourism, based on the sites of the Communist period, developed in different political and geographical regions, namely PR China and Eastern Europe, there are some major differences as shown by our review of their emergence and development. The following table references are the most important ones.

Table 1: Differences between Red Tourism and Communist Heritage Tourism

Domain	Red Tourism	Communist Heritage Tourism
Region /Countries	People's Republic of China	Former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe
Emergence	After 2004	After 1990
Development / Evolution	Planned by the State (by the Chinese Communist Government)	External demand - Determined by the demand for communist heritage sites from western tourists
Heritage sites	Related to the Chinese Communist Revolution	Related to communist regimes and their downfall
Heritage Interpretation	Glorifying the Communist Past and Present	Mainly negative view of the communist period
Target	Chinese young people (students)	Western tourists (people who lived on the other side of the Iron Curtain)
Education	Very Important aspect – Stimulate nationalist spirit and loyalty towards the Chinese Communist Party	Tendency to ignore, forget the communist past so the educational side of tourism is not well represented
Purpose	Glorifying the communist past	Recreation, expanding cultural horizons
Problems	Heritage interpretation – „Disneyfication”	Heritage interpretation – „dissonant heritage”

Both types use communist heritage sites as primary tourism resources. While Red Tourism focuses on sites related to the beginning of communism in China and to the Chinese Revolution, communist heritage tourism is linked to sites that remind of the communist past of the states of CE Europe.

In terms of planning and development Chinese Red Tourism is entirely run by the State (major investments in infrastructure and facilities and discounts for different categories of red tourists), communist heritage tourism in CE Europe evolved due to external demand for communist heritage sites.

One of the most important differences is related to the way heritage is presented to tourists. While in China, communist heritage is interpreted in a positive way and used to educate (young Chinese) tourists in the spirit of communism, in Eastern Europe there is a tendency to ignore communist heritage or to present in a negative way.

## **8. DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDIES**

Red tourism is a type of cultural tourism which emerged in PR China after 2004, developed by the state and based on the sites of the communist revolution.

Communist heritage tourism appeared in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe after 1990 as western tourists became interested in life on the other side of the Iron Curtain and in the heritage sites of the communist regimes and their downfall.

There shouldn't be confusion between the two tourism types, as there are many differences between them, in a vast array of aspects including development and planning, the market segment they are targeting, heritage interpretation (and the problems this brings) and the educational side of tourism.

In both cases there are problems regarding heritage interpretation. These are more pronounced in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe where there is an obvious tendency to erase or to present in a negative way the past spent under the communist regime.

Further studies on using communist heritage for tourism purposes can use this paper as a starting point as it defines communist heritage tourism as a distinct tourism type. Following studies will focus on communist heritage, its characteristics and the way it can be used as a tourism resource. This will include both detailed perception studies and studies regarding heritage management in urban spaces.

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